

CLOTHING IS A LANGUAGE

May 14, 2007 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

The following is from the author's new book, "Dressing from the Lord," which is available from Way of Life Literature. It is not available for order via the online catalog but can be ordered by phone or e-mail (866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org).

It is important to understand that clothing is a language. It is a "social message," a fashion "statement." The knowledge of this is the engine that drives the fashion industry, and the child of God needs to understand it, as well. I need to ask myself what message is my clothing broadcasting? Wikipedia defines fashion as "a prevailing mode of expression." It acknowledges that "every article of clothing carries a cultural and social meaning" and observes that "humans must know the code in order to recognize the message transmitted."

George Harrison of the Beatles, who rebelled against the way his father wanted him to act and dress, testified: "*Going in for flash clothes, or at least trying to be a bit different ... was part of the rebelling. I never cared for authority*" (Hunter Davies, *The Beatles*, p. 39).

Note that Harrison's flash clothing and non-conformity was intimately associated with his rebellion.

Mary Quant, the designer generally credited with inventing the mini-skirt in the mid-1960s, admitted that her aim was to entice men and promote licentiousness. She wanted something "daring" and "controversial," which refers to pushing moral boundaries, something sexually immodest. It was regarded as a "symbol of liberation." Some European countries banned the mini-skirt, saying it was an invitation to rape (Mary Quant, interview with Alison Adburgham, *The Guardian*, October 10, 1967). Quant also promoted a short hair style for women. Her fashions were statements and her clothing was a language.

Vivienne Westwood, who helped create the rock punk look, said, "I think fashion is the strongest form of communication there is. ... It's only interesting to me if it's subversive: that's the only reason I'm in fashion, to destroy the word 'conformity'" (Jon Savage, *Time Travel: Pop, Media and Sexuality 1976-96*, p. 119).

David Kidd once posed the following question to a young college girl who was inquiring about his family's conservative dress: "If you are shopping and see a girl in a long, loose fitting dress, what is your first impression of her?" Without any hesitation, she answered

“that she is probably religious.” He concluded, “It behooves us to recognize that our manner of dress is a statement that either reflects or contradicts our Christian purpose” (*The Fall and Rise of Christian Standards*, p. 154).

Hair styles are also statements. Long hair on men and short hair on women are not merely harmless fashions, a mere sign of the times, but are statements of rebellion against God’s created order (1 Corinthians 11:14-15).

The androgynous unisex image is not innocent. It was created by rock musicians who intended to overthrow tradition. One of the rock songs of the 1960s called upon young men to grow their hair long and “let your freak flag show.” David Lee Roth of Van Halen testified: “[My long hair] is a flag. It’s Tarzan. I’ll always be anti-establishment” (cited by John Makujina, *Measuring the Music*, p. 73).

Dennis Wilson of the Beach Boys sported long hair and popularized the “surfer cut” in the early 1960s. Commenting on the significance of this hair length, Wilson’s biographer observes: “The ‘surfer cut,’ as it came to be known, was a radical thing to behold in 1962. Few parents would permit their sons to sport the look” (Jon Stebbins, *Dennis Wilson: The Real Beach Boy*, p. 24). Dennis Wilson was a rebel and his appearance was merely a reflection of this. Observe, too, that the “surfer cut” was not that long compared to the long hair that came afterwards, but it was just long enough to be a bold statement of non-conformity. Small fashion changes can have large consequences.

Paul McCartney of the Beatles flippantly acknowledged their role in overthrowing sexual distinctions: “There they were in America, all getting house-trained for adulthood with their indisputable principle of life: short hair equals men; long hair equals women. Well, we got rid of that small convention for them. And a few others, too” (Barbara Ehrenreich, “Beatlemania: Girls Just Wanted to Have Fun,” cited by Lisa Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, p. 102).

Where did the “small convention” of “short hair equals men; long hair equals women” come from? Why was this an “indisputable principle of life” in America prior to the onslaught of Beatles’ style rock & roll in the 1960s? The answer is that America, because of its vast number of churches, had been influenced by the Bible in these things. It was Bible principles that the Beatles ridiculed and sought to overthrow.

Referring to the denim jean market in the 21st century, the web site fashionera.com observes that this market “is status ridden and has CODED TRIBAL SIGNS AND SIGNALS with it’s not so subtle stitching, logos, tabs, decorative pockets, shading and distressing.”

Abercrombie & Fitch, the clothing company that markets “edgy” clothing featuring loose sexuality, is “best known for its REBELLIOUS ATTITUDE” (“Flip-Flops, Torn Jeans,

and Control,” *Business Week*, May 30, 2005). Thus even the world recognizes the message of Abercrombie & Fitch clothing. They don’t merely sell clothing; they sell an attitude via a certain style of clothing.

In “The World according to Abercrombie and Fitch,” David Seel observed: “SUCCESSFUL BRANDS IN AMERICA DON’T SELL PRODUCTS. THEY SELL LIFESTYLES” (*Critique*, 2000).

Therefore, clothing styles are not innocent. Each style preaches a message.

Pantsuits preach the feminist’s message of equality of the sexes.

Tight fitting, low cut, short and skimpy styles preach the world’s message of loose sexuality.

Ripped jeans preach the message of a cheap affectation of poverty, of “I don’t care” and thus slovenliness, and of moral casualness.

Slit skirts preach the message of sexual flirtation.

God’s people must beware of sending the wrong message with their clothing. We must understand that the clothing industry is not in submission to God and cares nothing about submitting to His Word.

It doesn’t do to say, “Well, my tight, ripped jeans don’t preach that message TO ME.” The important point is not what message the clothing preaches to any particular individual who wears it, but what message it preaches in the context of its history and in the context of society at large and to those who are forced to look at it.

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor. 10:31-33).

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